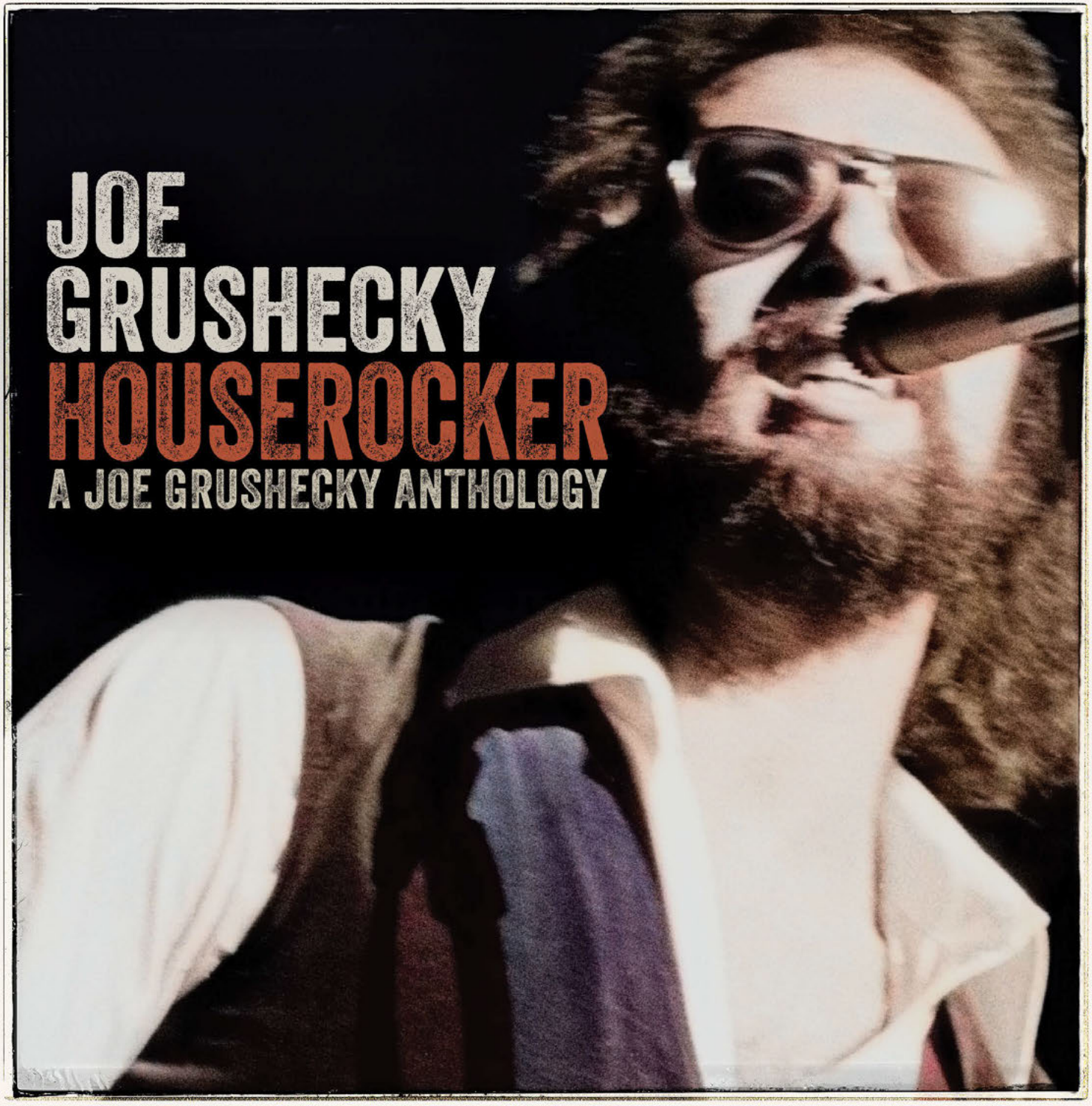
JOE
GRUSHECKY
HOUSEROCKER
A JOE GRUSHECKY ANTHOLOGY

DISC ONE

1. I CAN'T TAKE IT
2. HIDEAWAY
3. LOVE'S SO TOUGH
4. HAVE A GOOD TIME (BUT GET OUT ALIVE)
5. PUMPING IRON
6. WE'RE NOT DEAD YET
7. JUNIOR'S BAR
8. BLOOD ON THE BRICKS
9. A FOOL'S ADVICE
10. FRIDAY NIGHT
11. ROCK AND ROLL HEART
12. AMERICAN SON
13. ANGELS
14. I SHOULD HAVE NEVER LET YOU GO
15. GOODBYE STEELTOWN
16. ROCK AND REAL
17. HOW LONG
18. SWIMMING WITH THE SHARKS

DISC TWO

1. TALKING TO THE KING
2. CHAIN SMOKIN'
3. NEVER BE ENOUGH TIME
4. LABOR OF LOVE
5. EVERYTHING'S GOING TO WORK OUT RIGHT
6. I'M NOT SLEEPING
7. COMING HOME
8. YOU AND TONIGHT
9. FINGERPRINTS
10. TRUE COMPANION
11. A GOOD LIFE
12. CODE OF SILENCE
13. EAST CARSON STREET
14. ANOTHER THIN LINE
15. SOMEWHERE EAST OF EDEN
16. WHO CARES ABOUT THOSE KIDS
17. MORE YESTERDAYS THAN TOMORROWS
18. BLOOD SWEAT AND BEERS

DISC ONE – TRACKS 1-14: IRON CITY HOUSEROCKERS DISC ONE – TRACK 15: JOEY G.
DISC ONE – TRACKS 16-18, DISC TWO – TRACKS 1-7, 10, 13-14, 17-18: JOE GRUSHECKY AND THE HOUSEROCKERS DISC TWO – TRACKS 8-9, 11-12, 15-16: JOE GRUSHECKY

COMPILATION PRODUCED FOR RELEASE BY
CHERYL PAWELSKI & JOHNNY GRUSHECKY

Photo: Gered Mankovitz

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DISC ONE

ALL SONGS WRITTEN BY JOE GRUSHECKY
Except: **Love's So Tough** by Joe Grushecky/Gil Snyder; **We're Not Dead Yet** by Dan Beck/Joe Grushecky/Gil Snyder; **Junior's Bar** by Eddie Britt/Joe Grushecky/Gil Snyder; **Rock And Roll Heart** by Eddie Britt/Joe Grushecky/Art Nardini; **Angels** by Eddie Britt/Joe Grushecky; **Swimming With The Sharks** by Joe Grushecky/Art Nardini/Joe Pelesky/Joffo Simmons/Bill Toms

Tracks 1–3 originally issued on **LOVE'S SO TOUGH**, MCA/Cleveland International 3099 (1979)

Produced by **The Slimmer Twins (Steve Popovich** and **Marty Mooney)**
Engineers: **Jeff Kawalec**, **Arnie Rosenberg**
Recorded at **Agency Recorders**, Cleveland, OH
Mixed at **House of Music**, East Orange NJ

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
ART NARDINI – bass
GIL SNYDER – keyboards
NED E. RANKIN – drums
MARC REISMAN – harmonica
GARY SCALESE – guitar

with: **Billy Cross** – Guitar (Track 2); **Richard Reising**, **Susan Lynch**, **Rodney Psyka** – background vocals (Track 2)

Tracks 4–7 originally issued on **HAVE A GOOD TIME (BUT GET OUT ALIVE)**, MCA/Cleveland International 5111 (1980)

Produced by **The Slimmer Twins**, **Mick Ronson**, **Ian Hunter**, and **Steve Van Zandt**
Engineer: **Harvey Goldberg**
Recorded and Mixed at **Media Sound**, New York, NY

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
ART NARDINI – bass
GIL SNYDER – keyboards
NED E. RANKIN – drums
MARC REISMAN – harmonica
EDDIE BRITT – guitar

with: **Mick Ronson** – guitar (Tracks 4, 6), background vocals (Track 7); **Steve Van Zandt** – guitar (Track 7); **Ellen Foley** – background vocals (Track 7)

Tracks 8–10 originally issued on **BLOOD ON THE BRICKS**, MCA/Cleveland International 5252 (1981)

Produced by **Steve Cropper**
Engineer: **Bruce Robb**
Recorded and Mixed at **Cherokee Recording Studio**, Los Angeles, CA

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
ART NARDINI – bass
GIL SNYDER – keyboards, vocals
NED E. RANKIN – drums
MARC REISMAN – harmonica
EDDIE BRITT – guitar

with: **Steve Cropper** – guitar (Tracks 8–9); **Jim Horn** – saxophones (Track 9–10); **Steve Forman** – percussion (Track 8); **Steve Madeo** – trumpet (Track 9)

Tracks 11–14 originally issued on **CRACKING UNDER PRESSURE**, MCA 39004 (1983)

Produced and Engineered by **Mark Dodson**
Recorded at **Bearsville Studios**, Woodstock, NY

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
ART NARDINI – bass
GIL SNYDER – keyboards, vocals
EDDIE BRITT – guitar
RON "BIRD" FOSTER – drums, vocals

with: **Scott Mowry**– synthesizer programming (Track 13)

Track 15 originally issued on **GOODBYE STEELTOWN**, Green Dolphin [7"] 83184 (1984)

Produced by **Hermie Granati**
Recorded and Mixed by **Don Garvin**
at **Jeree Studios**, New Brighton, PA

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
ART NARDINI – bass
HERMIE GRANATI – keyboards, vocals
WARREN KING – guitar
RON "BIRD" FOSTER – drums, vocals
DONNIE IRIS – vocals
FRANK CZURI – vocals

Tracks 16–17 originally issued on **ROCK AND REAL**, Rounder 9020 (1989)

Produced by **Joe Grushecky**, **Art Nardini**, and **Dave Erny**
Recorded and Mixed by **Dave Erny**
at **Erny Recordings**, Pittsburgh, PA

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar, mandolin, harmonica
ART NARDINI – bass
BILL TOMS – guitar
JEFFREY "JOFFO" SIMMONS – drums
BERNIE HERR – percussion

Track 18 originally issued on **SWIMMING WITH THE SHARKS**, Rounder 9030 (1991)

Produced by **Bob Corbin** and **Barney Lee**
Recorded and Mixed by **Barney Lee**
at **Aircraft Studios**, Pittsburgh, PA

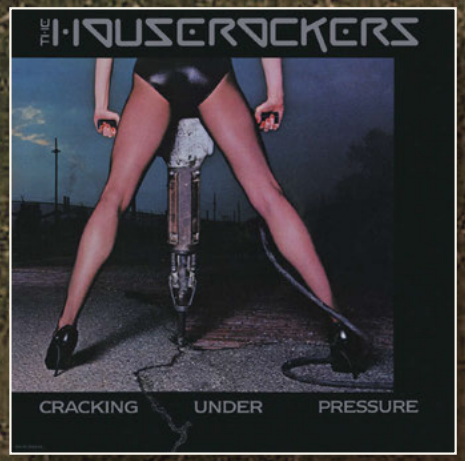
JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
ART NARDINI – bass
BILL TOMS – guitar
JEFFREY "JOFFO" SIMMONS – drums
BERNIE HERR – percussion
JOE PELESKY – vocals

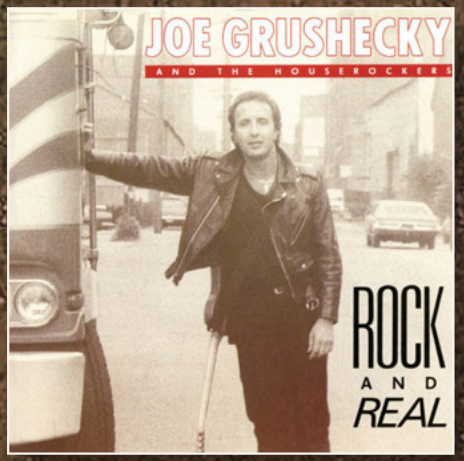
COMPILATION PRODUCED FOR RELEASE BY CHERYL PAWELSKI & JOHNNY GRUSHECKY
Mastered by **Michael Graves** at **Osiris Studio**, Los Angeles, CA • Business Affairs: **Glenn Schwartz** • Art Direction & Design: **Greg Allen**
Liner Notes: **Mike Ragogna** and **Joe Grushecky** • Photos courtesy of **Joe Grushecky** • Cover Photo: **Barbara Freeman**
Project Assistance: **Ronnie Barnett**, **Audrey Bilger**, **Dutch Cramblitt**, **Joy Graves**, **Lee Lodyga**, and **Brad Rosenberger**

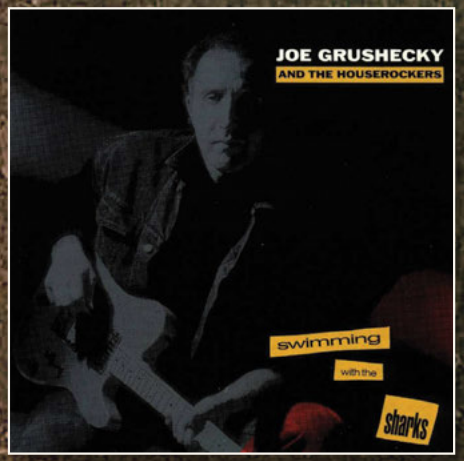
Disc 1: Tracks 1–3 Ⓟ 1979, Tracks 4–7 Ⓟ 1980 Cleveland International Records; Tracks 8–10 Ⓟ 1981 Cleveland International Records & Joe Grushecky; Tracks 11–14 Ⓟ 1983, Track 15 Ⓟ 1984 Joe Grushecky; Tracks 16–17 Ⓟ 1989, Track 18 Ⓟ 1991 Rounder Records, a Division of Concord; **Disc 2:** Track 1 Ⓟ 1992, Tracks 2–4 Ⓟ 1995, Tracks 5–7 Ⓟ 1997, Tracks 8–9 Ⓟ 2002, Track 10 Ⓟ 2003, Tracks 11–12 Ⓟ 2006, Tracks 13–14 Ⓟ 2009, Tracks 15–16 Ⓟ 2013, Tracks 17–18 Ⓟ 2018 Joe Grushecky

JOE GRUSHECKY HOUSEROCKER

A JOE GRUSHECKY ANTHOLOGY







DISC TWO

ALL SONGS WRITTEN BY JOE GRUSHECKY
Except: **Code Of Silence**, **I'm Not Sleeping**, **Another Thin Line** by Joe Grushecky/Bruce Springsteen; **Who Cares About Those Kids** by Joe Grushecky/Mat Warren

Track 1 originally issued on **END OF THE CENTURY**, Razon & Tie RT 2810 (1992)

Produced by **Joe Grushecky** and **Rick Witkowski**
Recorded and Mixed by **Rick Witkowski**
at **Studio L**, Weirton, WV

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar, mandolin
ART NARDINI – bass
BILL TOMS – guitar
JEFFREY "JOFFO" SIMMONS – drums
BERNIE HERR – percussion
JOE PELESKY – keyboards

Tracks 2–4 originally issued on **AMERICAN BABYLON**, Razor & Tie RT 2820 (1995)

Produced by **Bruce Springsteen**
Recorded and Mixed by **Toby Hill** at **Thrill Hill Recording**, Los Angeles, CA and **The Hit Factory**, New York, NY ("Chain Smokin'" and "Never Be Enough Time" Mixed by **Bob Clearmountain**)

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
ART NARDINI – bass
BILL TOMS – guitar
JEFFREY "JOFFO" SIMMONS – drums
BERNIE HERR – percussion
JOE PELESKY – keyboards

with: **Bruce Springsteen** – guitar, vocals (Tracks 2–4), mandolin (Track 4); **Zack Alford** – drums (Tracks 2–3); **Jerome Smith** – bass (Tracks 2–3); **Leon Pendarvis** – keyboards (Track 2)

Tracks 5–7 originally issued on **COMING HOME**, Viceroy Music 54244 (1997)

Produced by **Joe Grushecky** and **Rick Witkowski**
("Coming Home" Produced by **Philip Tennant**)
Recorded and Mixed by **Rick Witkowski** at **Studio L**, Weirton, WV (Additional Recording for "Coming Home" at **Intimate Studios**, London, England)

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
ART NARDINI – bass
BILL TOMS – guitar
JEFFREY "JOFFO" SIMMONS – drums
BERNIE HERR – percussion
JOE PELESKY – keyboards

with: **Phillip Tennant** – guitar, vocals (Track 7); **Martin Shallard** – guitar (Track 7); **Robin Scott** – keyboards (Track 7); **Rick Witkowski** – guitar, bass, vocals (Track 6); **Michael Barrozzi** – vocals (Track 5)

Tracks 8–9 originally issued on **FINGERPRINTS**, Schoolhouse Records SHR0018 (2002)

Produced by **Joe Grushecky** and **Rick Witkowski**
Recorded and Mixed by **Rick Witkowski**
at **Studio L**, Weirton, WV

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
TONY MORRA – drums
RICK WITKOWSKI – bass (Track 8), guitar (Track 9)
ED BROWN – bass (Track 9)
HERMIE GRANATI – keyboards (Track 9)
B.E. TAYLOR, DONNIE MARSICO – vocals (Track 9)

Track 10 originally issued on **TRUE COMPANION**, Schoolhouse Records SHR0023 (2003)

Produced by **Joe Grushecky** and **Rick Witkowski**
Recorded and Mixed by **Rick Witkowski**
at **Studio L**, Weirton, WV

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar, mandolin
ART NARDINI – bass
BILL TOMS – guitar
JEFFREY "JOFFO" SIMMONS – drums
MARC REISMAN – harmonica
BERNIE HERR – percussion
JOE PELESKY – keyboards

Tracks 11–12 originally issued on **A GOOD LIFE**, Schoolhouse Records SHR0035 (2006)

Produced by **Joe Grushecky** and **Rick Witkowski**
Recorded and Mixed by **Rick Witkowski**
at **Studio L**, Weirton, WV

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN – guitar, vocals
RICK WITKOWSKI – guitar (Tracks 11–12), percussion (Track 12)
TONY MORRA – drums
JEFF GARRISON – bass
RANDY BAUGHMAN – organ (Track 11)
JOHNNY GRUSHECKY – acoustic guitar (Track 12)

Tracks 13–14 originally issued on **EAST CARSON STREET**, Schoolhouse Records SHR0040 (2009)

Produced by **Joe Grushecky** and **Rick Witkowski**
Executive Producer: **Sammy Grosso**
Recorded and Mixed by **Rick Witkowski**
at **Studio L**, Weirton, WV

JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar, mandolin
ART NARDINI – bass
JEFFREY "JOFFO" SIMMONS – drums
DANNY GOCHNOUR – guitar
JOHNNY GRUSHECKY – guitar
JOE PELESKY – keyboards

with: **Bruce Springsteen** – guitar (Tracks 13–14), vocals (Track 14)

Tracks 15–16 originally issued on **SOMEWHERE EAST OF EDEN**, Schoolhouse Records 535518 (2013)

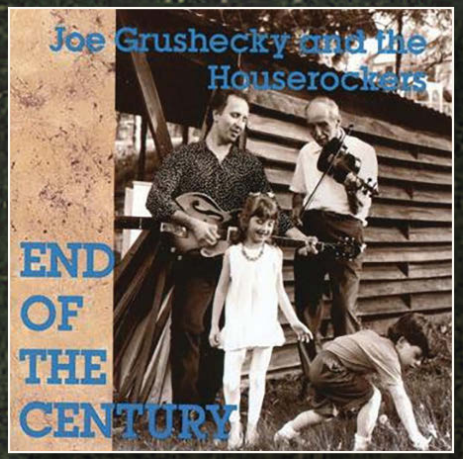
Produced by **Joe Grushecky** and **Rick Witkowski**
Recorded and Mixed by **Rick Witkowski**
at **Studio L**, Weirton, WV

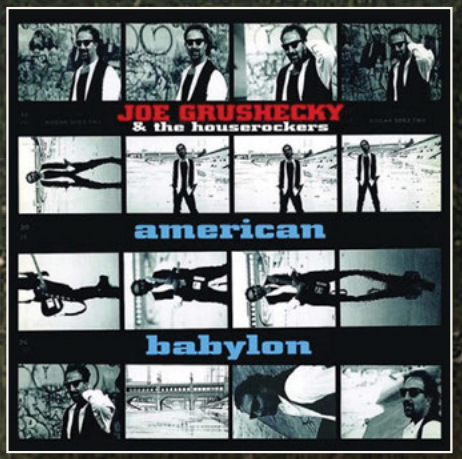
JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar,
RICK WITKOWSKI – bass, percussion (Track 15), guitar, vocals (Track 16)
JEFFREY "JOFFO" SIMMONS – drums (Track 15)
DANNY GOCHNOUR – guitar (Track 15)
JOE PELESKY – organ (Track 15)
ANTHONY RANKIN – drums, bass, keyboards (Track 16)

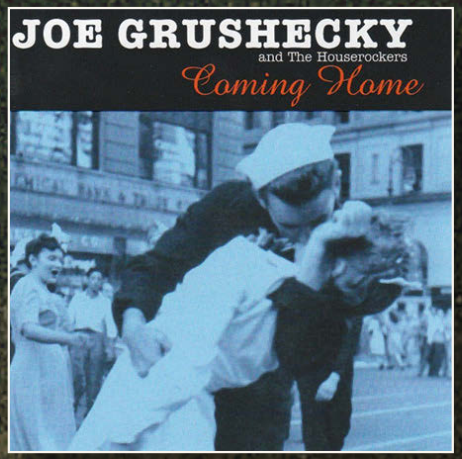
Tracks 17–18 originally issued on **MORE YESTERDAYS THAN TOMORROWS**, Schoolhouse Records SH1702 (2018)

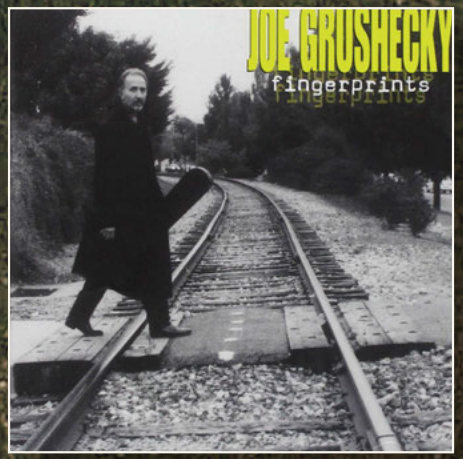
Produced by **Johnny Grushecky**, **Rick Witkowski**, and **Brian Coleman**
Recorded and Mixed by **Rick Witkowski** and **Brian Coleman** at **Studio L**, Weirton, WV

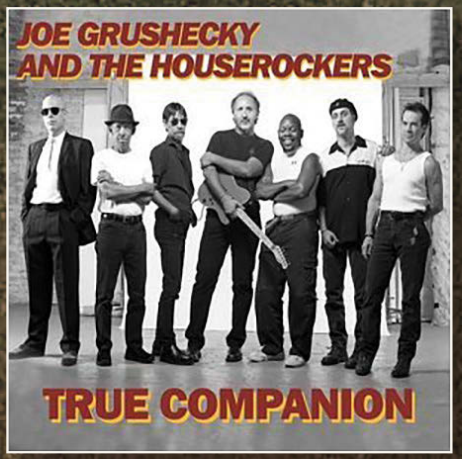
JOE GRUSHECKY – vocals, guitar
JEFFREY "JOFFO" SIMMONS – drums
DANNY GOCHNOUR – guitar
JEFF GARRISON – bass
JOHNNY GRUSHECKY – guitar, drums

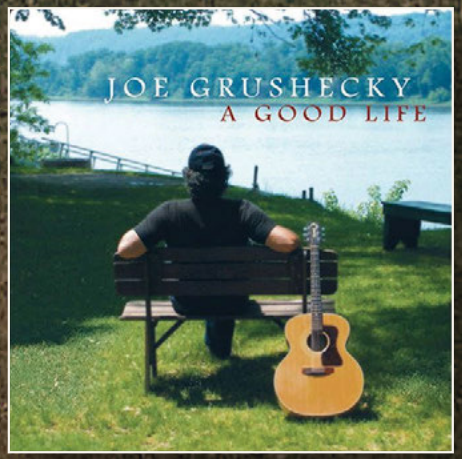

Joe Grushecky and the Houserockers
END OF THE CENTURY


JOE GRUSHECKY
& the houserockers
american
babylon

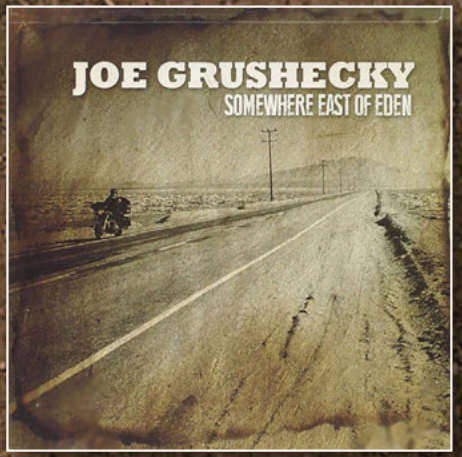

JOE GRUSHECKY
and The Houserockers
Coming Home


JOE GRUSHECKY
fingerprints

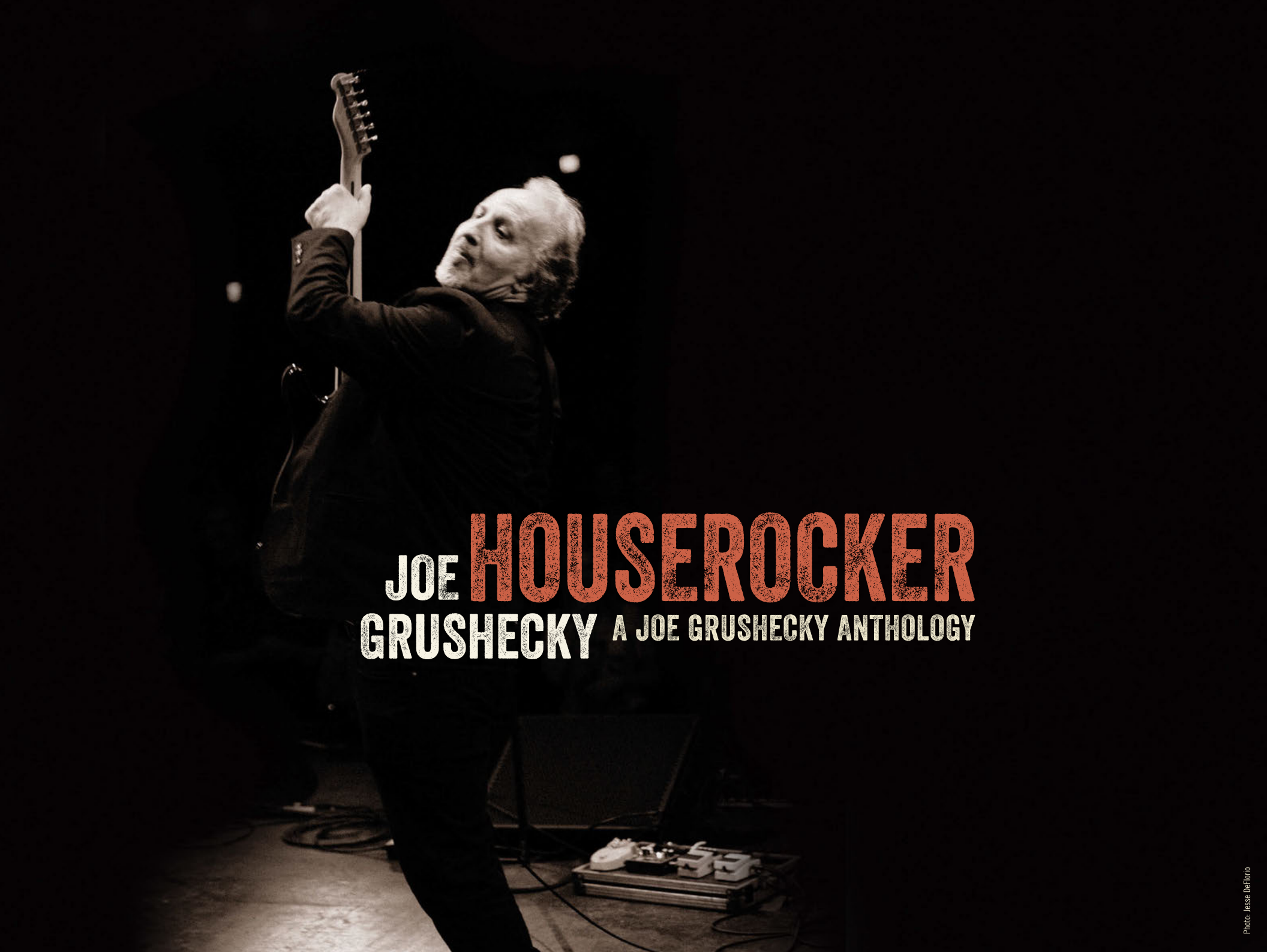

JOE GRUSHECKY
AND THE HOUSEROCKERS
TRUE COMPANION


JOE GRUSHECKY
A GOOD LIFE

JOE GRUSHECKY
AND THE HOUSEROCKERS
East Carson Street


JOE GRUSHECKY
SOMEWHERE EAST OF EDEN

Joe Grushecky and the Houserockers
More Yesterdays Than Tomorrows



JOE GRUSHECKY HOUSEROCKER

A JOE GRUSHECKY ANTHOLOGY

Photo: Jesse DeFlorio

Photo: Barbara Freeman

JOE GRUSHECKY GREW UP A PITTSBURGH KID IN THE COAL MINING TOWN OF BIDDLE WHERE HIS FAMILY PURSUED THE LOCAL PROFESSION. HIS DAD JOHN'S SIDE OF THE FAMILY WAS EXTREMELY POOR, BUT JOHN BALANCED IT WITH A LOVE OF MUSIC THAT INCLUDED COUNTRY AND BIG BAND, AND HE LEARNED TO PLAY MANY INSTRUMENTS HIMSELF. OFTEN, HE PICKED UP THE GUITAR AND SERENADED HIS WIFE MILLIE WHILE SHE WASHED CLOTHES, PLAYFULLY SINGING TOGETHER.

Joe's Uncle Mike was another musically inclined family member. "I can remember him combing his hair back," says Grushecky, "and he had one of those little portable record machines with a stack of 45s. Jerry Lee Lewis, The Cadillacs, The Platters' 'The Great Pretender'—that kind of stuff stuck with me." Around the house, Joe himself, sang his fair share of hits by groups like The Kingsmen and The Four Seasons, later gravitating toward The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and the blues. It was catching The Beatles on TV, that motivated Joe to buy a guitar. Earning about 10 dollars a week from his paper route and working at the lumber yard on Saturdays, he eventually saved up the 69 dollars for a Sears & Roebuck Silvertone guitar with an amplifier built into its case.

"My first gig was at The Westmoreland City Fire Hall and my two debut songs were 'Wooly Bully' and 'Gloria,' says Joe. "On a typical weekend in Pittsburgh, you'd either play out with your band or go to the teen nightclubs. That's where I saw Wilson Pickett, Bo Diddley, and Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs. Grooves were very important in those clubs where everyone would dance." Joe also caught Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels. "Jimmy McCarty from Mitch Ryder's band was one of my all-time favorites. He was the first hot shit guitar player I ever saw."

"My dad encouraged me to go to college, so I went to California State in Pennsylvania. We used to joke and call it 'Harvard on the Mon.' It was right on the Monongahela River in this little mill town. We weren't allowed to have a guitar in the dorm room, so if I wanted to play, I'd have to come home on weekends." Joe bought his first Telecaster at a pawn shop in New Jersey while working at the race track in Atlantic City during summer break. "I was straddling two worlds," Joe says. "I was in college getting a degree in the new field of Special Education while I also had a band called The Shooo. We were a jam band with real long hair, like a musical heir to Cream and Jimi Hendrix." The Shooo became popular enough to audition with RCA Records, but the A&R man showed up hours late and the band wandered off blowing the tryout.

By 1970, Grushecky had his Special Ed degree and a growing repertoire of original songs, but he wasn't ready to teach full time. Yet, he couldn't relate to the music trends of the time. "I just didn't feel like music was speaking to me," Joe explains. "I played, but I wasn't writing songs, so I traveled around for a couple years. In '74, I was playing at an after-hours club called The Witzbacher in Pittsburgh from 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. We were playing a lot of J. Geils, not doing any original music, I just lost my mojo. But one night, Art Nardini, who became my musical partner from 1974–2016, came in and asked if I wanted to start a band. I told him only if we played originals. Art knew that I wrote songs since he was a fan of The Shooo." The pair launched the Brick Alley Band.

The Brick Alley Band rehearsed relentlessly. "I was financing my rock and roll dreams by teaching in an institution for the profoundly mentally disabled.

I was in the first wave that entered those institutions. The kids I worked with in those days were called 'profoundly retarded.' That's how primitive it was." Within two years, Joe taught many of the children to walk and eat among other things. "It was really, really a good job—the best job I ever had. After several tries, we found a bar in Pittsburgh called The Gazebo that was willing to step outside the cover band box. We started at 10:30 and played an hour of everything from James Brown to The Stones, but nothing Top 40. In the second set, we played our original songs for an hour to 90 minutes. Lo and behold, we caught on."

Word got out about the Brick Alley Band, all the way to Cleveland. International, that is. Steve Popovich, head of the Cleveland International label, and protege of Clive Davis and Ron Alexenburg, responded to the Brick Alley Band demo. Joe had learned of Popovich after seeing the full-page advertisement taken out in *Billboard* to promote Ronnie Spector's "Say Goodbye To Hollywood" single, her cover of Billy Joel's original. Popovich called after receiving the demo and invited the band over to his house one Sunday afternoon. "We pulled up, knocked on the door, and there's Ronnie Spector in a fluorescent purple bikini. I almost fainted. She said, 'Oh, Hi. Steve will be here in a little while,' and she invited us back to the patio and pool."

The band sat down with the exec in his office where he revealed he was the bass player on Lee Diamond's "Mama Loochie," and asked if they could record the song. Joe and the group agreed and were sent back to Pittsburgh with what Joe describes as "a pocket full of hope." "We got back, recorded a bunch of stuff, and sent it to Steve. He liked what he heard, cut us another check, and eventually, he signed us."

In 1977 as a new member of the Cleveland International family, the band was renamed "Iron City Houserockers" inspired by the band's song "House Rocker" in tribute to acts like Conway Twitty and Hound Dog Taylor. The Houserockers scored a steady gig at the popular Pittsburgh club The Decade by night, driving to Cleveland early in the mornings to record, then back home afterward to play their night gig again. The first album benefited from the process. Joe remembers, "During that time, it was like trying to transfer our live show to tape." Under the guidance of Popovich and Marty Mooney (The Slimmer Twins) they recorded thoughout 1978 with the LP release of *Love's So Tough* finally debuting in 1979 on MCA.

Comically, the first time Joe and The Houserockers saw their pressed-up album was at a Pittsburgh radio station. "There was this beautiful woman on the cover, we had no idea who she was, to this day, I have no fucking idea who she was!" Regardless, in *Rolling Stone*'s Greil Marcus review, the LP was singled out as Best Debut of the Year catching everyone by surprise. The Fred Goodman-penned single, "Hideaway," received solid airplay, especially in Pennsylvania, and a picture disc of the LP was created for the 1979 NARM convention.

Photo: Barbara Freeman

However, after signing with a booking agent to tour, a throat tumor sidelined Joe, and with it went the opportunity to take advantage of the album's marketing campaign. "I went down with the cancer scare, and it took me a while to recuperate from the operation and sing again."

A new batch of songs were written for the follow-up album *Have A Good Time (But Get Out Alive)*, that traded the Slimmer Twins' basic supervision for high profile producers. With Joe recovering and the band rehearsing at SIR Studios in NYC, Popovich walked into the room with Mick Ronson, one of David Bowie's great creative collaborators, and announced Ronson would help with the album production. Another rehearsal day, the label head appeared with Steve Van Zandt who also began working with the band. According to Joe, "Steve and Mick got into a little bit of friendly competition. We would work on a song with Steve in the morning and then Mick would come in later and cut a different version."

That competition sat side by side on the album in "Old Man Bar," Ronson's production, sequentially placed right before "Junior's Bar," Van Zandt's version. "It was a lot of fun and one hell of an experience," Joe reveals. After producing a handful of songs, Van Zandt exited to focus on *The River*. Ian Hunter entered the mix, and wound up producing two cuts.

For the Iron City Houserockers' third album, *Blood On The Bricks*, MCA assigned R&B studio legend Steve Cropper. It took a lighter, shinier approach to the previous two raw and energetic albums. Exclusively comprised of Grushecky originals, Joe feels it's the best played Houserockers album. "We all rose to the occasion because we didn't want to disappoint Steve Cropper. He was an idol of ours and a tremendous musician. We raised our playing and professionalism quite a bit."

The band felt good about things but started to shed players and in '83, just two days after their aptly-titled fourth album, *Cracking Under Pressure*, was released, the Iron City Houserockers were dropped by MCA. It was the '80s and radio was changing drastically. "They really wanted us to sound like '80s pop. I loved our producer Mark Dodson, but I should have told MCA to go fuck themselves because we made too many compromises. We didn't want them to drop us. They told us, 'You do things our way or we're dropping you.' Then they dropped us anyway. They were brutal about it."

"So after making that record and the band imploding, I just got discouraged and the rest of the guys got antsy." Irving Azoff had taken control of MCA and many acts were dropped. Another thing that got dropped was the name Joe Grushecky. Now going by "Joey G.," Joe released the single "Radio Ears" backed with "Goodbye Steeltown" on the regional Green Dolphin label in '84. It was a minor hit in the Tri-State area and to support it, Joe decided to reclaim the Brick Alley Band concept for gigs. The band was great in the clubs, but we just didn't have the right studio stuff then."

Joe married Lee Ann in '86 and had their daughter Desiree that same year. Their son Johnny followed in '88 and with health benefits now a concern, Joe went back to teaching special needs kids but continued songwriting, recording and performing. "At this point, I'm doing everything myself, even booking." The results can be found on his two Rounder Records albums, *Rock And Real* (1989) and *Swimming With The Sharks* (1991). "I had no manager, no agents but somehow, my passion for music never waned. I sent demo tapes to Rounder Records, and they signed me. I didn't want to be the Iron City Houserockers anymore, so it became Joe Grushecky And The Houserockers." Teaching part time too, he helped over a hundred people get their GEDs. "I was working at Father Ryan's Center in McKees Rocks. It was a community center built from the ground up by a Catholic priest and Sister Ruth." Joe also worked at the Craig House, a school for emotionally distressed students. "It was a whole different mindset because I had to be a disciplinarian. You couldn't let them get away with anything while still giving them as much love as you could."

After the Rounder deal wound down, Joe was signed to Razor & Tie with the *End Of The Century* album appearing in 1992. The album was produced by Crack The Sky's Rick Witkowski, who Joe had met, appropriately, in a record store. Joe continued playing out at least two nights a week while working all day and much of the night between 1992-1994. "I was working myself to death and we weren't getting anywhere. It was the only time I was thinking about throwing in the towel. "Lee Ann suggested that I should call Bruce and ask him to play on a song."

Joe had met Springsteen when Steve Van Zandt produced tracks for *Have A Good Time (But Get Out Alive)*. In 1981, Springsteen sat in with the Houserockers at Clarence Clemons' club, Big Man's West. Afterward, Joe joined Bruce in his car for a drive around Jersey, ending up at his house where he played him what would become a track from *Nebraska*. "We just got to be good friends."

"I had taken a weeknight acoustic gig at a bar on East Carson Street in Pittsburgh, and it was—you know, singles, drinking—and I don't do many covers. So, I'm playing the first set, nobody's listening, and I'm thinking, "What the fuck am I doing here?' On a break, Brian Coleman, our longtime sound man, comes up and said that Lee Ann just called and wanted me to call home right away. So, I get on the phone where they're making food and banging around, thinking something's wrong. She said, 'Bruce just called. You better call him right now.'" Springsteen was on the line inviting him to Los Angeles to record a song. This began what Joe describes as his career's "second lease on life."

"Out in L.A., Bruce had an estate with two homes and one of them had a studio in it. My wife and I stayed there while we recorded. I had the song

Photo: Cory Morton

"Chain Smokin'" that I thought was really good. I came with about 10 songs to play for him and when we got to the end, he said, 'You got anything else?' I had been performing a version of 'Never Be Enough Time,' that was the last song on *Cracking Under Pressure*. I played it for Bruce, and he said, 'Man, this is a really good one. Let's do it,' so we spent the next day working on it and went to New York to finish it up."

Back home after tracking "Never Be Enough Time," Joe was gifted a book about steelworkers that became the inspiration for the song "Homestead." Joe showed his lyrics to Bruce who looked at them, folded the paper up, and put it in his back pocket. "So, we recorded 'Homestead' and little by little, we pieced the record together."

Picking up steam, Joe was signed by Pinnacle, and took the band out to L.A. to record. The album was a family affair with Bruce playing multiple parts, wife Patti Scialfa singing, and Bruce's photographer sister, Pamela's photo contributions.

American Babylon, was released on Razor & Tie in the U.S., and followed by a series of promotional club dates dubbed the October Assault, with Bruce volunteering to be a Houserocker for the week.

"I was getting ready to make the next record, *Coming Home* when the label was sold and I was left without a home again. I had to find another job in Special Ed. After that, I never quit another day job because it was too hard supporting a family and that has always been my top priority. The rest of the albums, I financed myself." During the ensuing years, Joe released a combination of studio Houserocker albums and solo projects. There were live albums as well as the Houserockers' title track contribution to the Bruce Springsteen 2003 tribute album, *Light Of Day which* was created to bring greater visibility to Parkinson's Disease and to ultimately help defeat the illness.

Bob Benjamin, Joe's longtime manager and friend, established the Light Of Day Foundation after contracting Parkinson's. In 2000, through their partnership with Tony Pallagrosi, the first of a series of Light Of Day benefit shows was organized. Joe Grushecky and the Houserockers have appeared at every headlining event, and Joe serves on the Board of Directors.

Well into his 40th year of writing, recording, and performing, Joe has continued to make albums in the musical tradition of artists like Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones, Tom Petty, and Bruce Springsteen. Grushecky has been making American blue-collar rock that draws from classic rock 'n' roll, Memphis soul, folk songs, and electric blues, plus a dash of punk since the late 1970s. "Right now, I feel that this is the best band that we have ever had, and we are very excited about our future."

—Mike Ragogna & Joe Grushecky
March 2024

TRACK-BY-TRACK

BY JOE GRUSHECKY

I CAN'T TAKE IT

The first track off our debut record. Art Nardini and I started the band with the intention of making records. We rehearsed constantly and everyone contributed to our rough and tumble sound. I was writing about what was going on in Pittsburgh at that time. The steel mills were collapsing and our home seemed to be losing its identity. It was a very, very, tough town when we started. We were the quintessential, angry young men at this stage. We fought our way out of more than one bar back then. It was like when they asked Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, "What are you rebelling against," and he said, "Whadda got?" That's where we were. The band captured the mood and the sound of the city at that time.

HIDEAWAY

A Fred Goodman song that the record company encouraged us to record. Left to our own devices, we probably would have said no. We didn't want to do any covers, but cooler heads prevailed and it became our highest charting song.

LOVE'S SO TOUGH

We were writing and rehearsing constantly trying to come up with enough good material to complete an album. We had a steady live gig where we tried out this song and it was well received. The next morning we drove to Cleveland and recorded it at Agency Recording above the Agora. After we were done that day, we drove back to play another Friday night gig. Gil "The Duke" Snyder helped write the music.

HAVE A GOOD TIME (BUT GET OUT ALIVE)

We were constantly playing these rough-ass bars in Pittsburgh, and had a large group of guys that would come see us every night. More often than not, as the evening progressed and the drinks and drugs kicked in, fights would break out. One night, a wild brawl started and I called out from the stage, "Hey, man, you guys got to settle down. Somebody's going to get hurt. Have a good time but get out alive!" I went home and started thinking how crazy some of those guys were. The phrase just stuck in my head. Mick Ronson came up with that killer guitar lick to start the song.

PUMPING IRON

The Western Pennsylvania towns that I grew up in were built to house coal miners, foundrymen, and steelworkers. My dad started working as a miner at the tender age of 12. When I was in high school, the old guys would arrange a trip for all the teenagers in town to visit Homestead Steel Works. It was like a sneak peek into hell. In this song, I was writing about all the guys I grew up with who became steelworkers. It was work hard, play harder. The band had really honed our sound by this time and this became our anthem.

WE'RE NOT DEAD YET

This started as a ballad that we thought was going to be the big song, then Ian Hunter got a hold of it and transformed it into what it became.

Steve Popovich was a wild man. He actually went out on the streets of New York City and drug in a whole group of strangers—and had them do that "whoa whoa" gang vocal on it. "OK see ya later. Thanks for your help." I didn't know what the hell to make of it all, but it turned out to be a very, very popular song. Gil Snyder and Dan Beck helped out with the music and lyrics.

JUNIOR'S BAR

We had recorded "Old Man Bar," arranged by Mick Ronson, as a folk song about a bar that we all knew intimately because there was one on every block. You want to drink cheaply? That's where you went. During the recording of that album, Steve Van Zandt arranged a rock and roll version, so we recorded two completely different versions of the song and used them both: one about the bars our dads hung out in and the other about the ones we played in. My contribution was the lyrics. I rewrote them to reflect The Decade, a bar which was our home base.

BLOOD ON THE BRICKS

This song was originally called "Jukebox Nights." Steve Cropper was in town working with us on it and we had most of the songs down that we were going to record, but I was struggling with this particular song. The next to last day of rehearsal, I was driving home and somebody had written "JJ plus Little Girl" on the bricks of a bridge in red. I thought, "Man, that looks like blood on the bricks," and when I got home that night, that image struck me. I tried to conjure up something that The Animals would do with it. I don't know if I succeeded or not, but it's one of my better pieces of songwriting.

A FOOL'S ADVICE

Shortly after John Lennon was killed, I was at a family gathering, processing losing The Beatles and John Lennon. I just couldn't shake it. I excused myself for about a half hour, went to a quiet spot, and wrote the song. It just poured out of me. It was a major thrill playing it on the record with Steve Cropper.

FRIDAY NIGHT

Always the big night: work hard all week, go out Friday night, and just cut it loose. Friday was special, "Oh man, I don't have to go to work tomorrow!" Thanks to Jim Horn for the sax solo. It was pick hit of the week on *Solid Gold*!

ROCK AND ROLL HEART

I love all those '60s singles that I grew up listening to. I was trying to write a pop song like "Mony Mony." It was the mid-'80s and the sound of the *Cracking Under Pressure* record reflects that time period. What's better than having a girl with a rock and roll heart?

AMERICAN SON

It's my "being on the road" song. I wanted to make it hard edged with a sense of travel and being out there searching. I was trying to capture the vastness of driving across America.

ANGELS

Eddie Britt, our guitar player, wrote the music. I was flying home from somewhere and dozed off in the plane. I thought I heard the angels sing. I woke up and was like, "God, I'm glad I'm still here." I thought I was going somewhere, you know?

I SHOULD HAVE NEVER LET YOU GO

Well, it's your classic love song about the ones that get away. Yeah.

GOODBYE STEELTOWN

I was reading the newspaper, and that was the day's headline. The last major steel mills were closing in Pittsburgh. It's hard to put into words how important the mills were back in the day. Everything was built around them. A whole way of life and whole class of people were slipping away. People were leaving the city in droves. Our fan base was disappearing. That particular working-class experience is history now . . . it's all gone.

ROCK AND REAL

I wrote that song the day my daughter was born. My wife was still in the hospital and when I came home, one of our roadies took me out. He said, "Come on, we gotta have a drink to celebrate!" So, we went to The Decade and I ran into an old friend who I had not seen for a long time. We were talking and laughing it up. He said, "You know, I love your music. It's not rock and roll. It's rock and *real*. It's about real life." I thought, "That's pretty good, it's a title—"Rock And Real!" So I fashioned the song around that title. I wanted to tell the story of me growing up, getting a guitar, and how it changed my life. Art and I had put a new band together and this was our first time in the studio.

HOW LONG

This song was my own State of the Union address about what was going on in my particular little world at that time back in those George Bush Senior years. I think I even referenced one of the banking scams.

SWIMMING WITH THE SHARKS

The band actually sat down and wrote this one at rehearsal after we came back from a New York City trip. I said, "Hey, man, we're swimming with the sharks up here. "You had to be careful where you were walking and where you parked your truck. It wasn't like Pittsburgh. You had to have your guard up.

TALKING TO THE KING

This was a dream that I had about Elvis. He was down in my kitchen going through my refrigerator. I went down and had a conversation with him. He wanted to jam!! So, I got out my guitar and started jamming with the King in the Promised Land.

L–R: Eddie Britt, Gil Snyder, Art Nardini, Joe Grushecky, Marc Reisman, Ned Rankin

Photo: Barbara Freeman

L–R: Danny Gochnour, Jeffrey "Joffo" Simmons, Joe Grushecky, Jeff Garrison, Johnny Grushecky

Photo: Jesse DeFlorio

CHAIN SMOKIN'

Bruce Springsteen had invited me to Los Angeles to record and this was the first song we worked on together. I always tell people that song is deceptively simple because it took me a really long time to write it. I was smoking two packs a day when I first started it—Marlboro Reds. I just fucked around with it and fucked around with it some more. By the time I got the song done, I was basically smoke free! I kept putting it on a shelf, then coming back to it thinking, "I got something here, but I'm not quite sure what it is yet." I had to let it simmer for a while.

NEVER BE ENOUGH TIME

Bruce liked the acoustic version I was playing at the time, so I played him the Houserocker's version (from *Cracking Under Pressure*), he said, "Oh, we could top that." One of my favorite lines in it was, "Talk about why you liked The Miracles and I dug The Temptations." We may have had some similar stuff going on, but there was a great divide between Smokey and David Ruffin.

LABOR OF LOVE

It was a beautiful summer day. My kids were a little bit older and everybody was out doing something after dinner. My wife was leaving and there was a whole pile of dirty dishes and I said, "Hey, aren't you gonna do dishes?" She said, "No, now it's *your* turn—think of it as a labor of love." I said, "Okay, see you later." So, I washed about two or three dishes and then the song just came down from who knows where and popped itself into in my head. I thought, "Stop doing the dishes and write the song!"

EVERYTHING'S GOING TO WORK OUT RIGHT

It's about your hope and prayers for every day. You know, you get up, say, "I hope this is going to be a great day and everything's gonna be OK." There were lots of times we struggled financially. The teaching jobs I had were in really rough schools that paid low wages and had expensive health insurance premiums. This song was an expression of hope that everything would work out. You know, don't worry, it's gonna be all right, when you get up in the morning, it's a brand-new day.

I'M NOT SLEEPING

When my Dad would start dozing off watching TV, I would say, "Hey, dad, get up!" He would reply, "It's okay, I'm not sleeping. I'm only resting my eyes!" It was a phrase that always stuck with me that I used to write this song. The song is about paranoia and being afraid to go out. There was probably something crazy going on in the world at that time. Bruce came up with the music for it.

COMING HOME

We were recording *Coming Home* and I didn't feel like we had a title track yet. I had a song about 1945—"He's coming home, it's 1945" and I wanted to write something poppy that tied

all of the songs together. I came up with "Coming Home" in a hotel room in Atlantic City after being out on the road for a couple of weeks.

YOU AND TONIGHT

I usually try to think of something lyrically before I sit down and start writing. This one I had the music first. I had some cool guitar stuff and I think it's some of my best guitar work.

FINGERPRINTS

I got the idea from Bruce when we were writing songs together. He said, "I'd like to try to come up with something about fingerprints, you know, everybody you touch and everybody that touches you leaves their fingerprints on you and shapes who you are in some way." We never got back to write it together, but I thought it was a great idea. I just wrote about my life, my family, and how I felt about all the people who left their imprint on me. I was branching out musically without the band.

TRUE COMPANION

A song about friendship—who's with you, who's not. I was going through some difficult times with the band and I probably was saying subconsciously, "Are you with me, or not? Who's going to be my true companion?" My career's been peaks and valleys. That was definitely a valley period.

A GOOD LIFE

I was feeling grateful for all I had. It was just another slice of life, one of my happy songs. Bruce contributed to the recording. He played the guitar solo and sings on it quite a bit. It was just a fun song. When the Steelers won the Super Bowl in 2006, it was played on the stadium sound system at every home game!

CODE OF SILENCE

Bruce and I were writing some songs just to get the old juices flowing. I sent him a bunch of lyrics and he came up with music. I found this idea in an old notebook where I kept ideas, songs, and titles over the years. I have volumes and volumes of scrap paper and notebooks. Every once in a while, I go back through them. I don't know how I came up with the title. It was probably from watching a mafia movie. We made the song about relationships, but it comes from the whole mafia code of silence.

EAST CARSON STREET

I was working on the *East Carson Street* album and my son, Johnny, came to me and said, "Dad, you don't have a title track for this record. You need something better than you have now." In my notebooks, I had the title "East Carson Street." I had been sitting on it for 25 years because that was the part of the city in the South Side where I originally hung out all the time. Johnny said, "That is a really good title. You should try to do something with it." Later that evening, I went to a Pittsburgh Filmmaker's presentation. A gentleman who had been to L.A. and had achieved some success in the movie biz said to me, "You know, you should have left this town years ago. If you want to make it, you better get out of this town." When I got home that night, the song just wrote itself. It's my love letter to the city of Pittsburgh.

ANOTHER THIN LINE

I can remember distinctly driving to work on a Monday after another Steeler close loss at home. It was a gloomy-ass beginning of another work week type of day. The song just came to me. I wrote the lyrics down and Bruce wrote the music.

SOMEWHERE EAST OF EDEN

John Steinbeck's *East Of Eden* is one of my favorite books of all time. I was reading the news about an Iraqi war veteran coming home and all the struggles he was going through. Iraq is the fertile crescent where civilization began. Some people say the Garden of Eden was there. So, I just connected the dots. I wrote this song about a veteran's return from hell.

WHO CARES ABOUT THOSE KIDS

The kids I worked with as a special education teacher usually had mothers who were caretakers and fathers who were absent. This song takes stories of those kids and tries to get in their heads a bit. They all needed love and acceptance.

MORE YESTERDAYS THAN TOMORROWS

I was recording a blues record, believe it or not, and I was trying to write some blues songs, while also recording covers. Johnny came in my office one day and said, "Hey, dad, how's that new record coming along?" I said, "Oh, it's great. I'm almost done with it." Then he said, "I got news for you. It sucks!" He said it was the worst thing I ever did. I asked why he thought that, and he said, "Because the songs are meaningless." Then he said something I'll never forget: "You know, you're Joe Grushecky. I expect more out of you than this." That was a wake-up call if there ever was one, so I started writing like crazy and came up with this phrase that I'm assuming I didn't originate because it's pretty heavy. "I've seen more yesterdays than I ever will tomorrows." You start feeling a little bit older and that clock is ticking a little bit louder. You see the train coming down the other end of the tunnel. So, I just crafted this song around that idea. Getting Johnny involved in the production was a turning point with my music. A little bit different sound started to emerge. He drums on it and did a really good job helping me arrange it.

BLOOD SWEAT AND BEERS

"Blood Sweat And Beers" is our return to the boogie. I basically nicked it from Winston Churchill. It is a great song to play live.

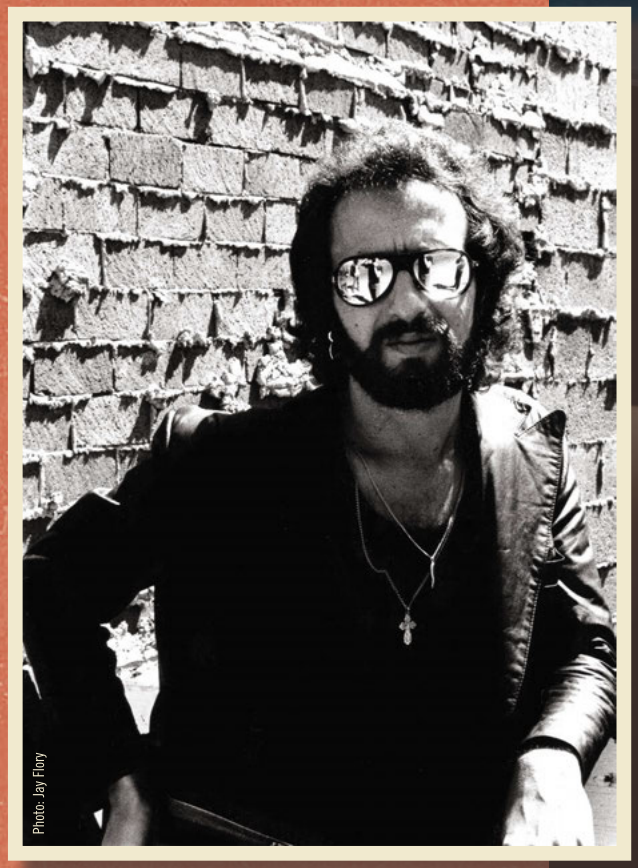


Photo: Jay Flory

Photo: Matt Adams